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Financing of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara

Budget performance for the period from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016 and proposed budget for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018 of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

Appropriation for 2015/16	$51,118,300
Expenditure for 2015/16	$50,148,300
Unencumbered balance for 2015/16	$970,000
Appropriation for 2016/17	$52,550,400
Projected expenditure for 2016/17[a]	$52,334,400
Projected underexpenditure for 2016/17[a]	$216,000
Proposal submitted by the Secretary-General for 2017/18	$55,155,600
Recommendation of the Advisory Committee for 2017/18	$53,470,000

[a] Estimate as at 31 January 2017.

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I. Introduction

1. **The recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in paragraphs 25, 29, 40 and 42 below would entail a reduction of $1,685,600 to the proposed budget of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018 (A/71/760 and Corr.1).** The Advisory Committee has made recommendations and observations on specific issues, where appropriate, in the paragraphs below.

2. During its consideration of the financing of MINURSO, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses received on 11 April 2017. The documents reviewed and those used for background by the Committee are listed at the end of the present report. The Committee's detailed comments and recommendations on the findings of the Board of Auditors on the United Nations peacekeeping operations for the period from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016 and on cross-cutting issues related to peacekeeping operations can be found in its related reports (A/71/845 and A/71/836, respectively). The main observations and recommendations of the Board of Auditors pertaining specifically to MINURSO are discussed in paragraph 7 below.

II. Budget performance report for the period from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016

3. The General Assembly, in its resolution 69/305, appropriated an amount of $51,118,300 gross ($49,002,100 net) for the maintenance of the Mission for the period from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016. The total amount has been assessed on Member States. Expenditures totalled $50,148,300 gross for the reporting period, representing an implementation rate of 98.1 per cent, leaving an unencumbered balance of $970,000 gross, or 1.9 per cent.

4. In his report on the budget performance of MINURSO for the period from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016 (A/71/639), the Secretary-General states that, on 16 March 2016, the Moroccan authorities demanded the departure of 84 MINURSO international civilian and African Union personnel from Western Sahara and that none of the staff members who had left had been able to return to the Mission area by 30 June 2016 (see paras. 31-33 below). The Security Council, in its resolution 2285 (2016), emphasized the urgent need for MINURSO to return to full functionality. While negotiations were ongoing with respect to the implementation of the Council resolution, as a temporary measure 25 international staff encumbering critical functions were temporarily relocated to Las Palmas, Spain, to continue performing their functions remotely. This measure allowed the Mission to continue operating, albeit with a severely reduced capacity. The Secretary-General indicates that the impact of the departure of personnel was primarily responsible for underperformance in a number of key performance indicators for the period (see A/71/639, para. 10).

5. An analysis of variances is provided in section IV of the report of the Secretary-General on the budget performance of MINURSO. The unencumbered balance of $970,000 gross was mainly attributable to reduced requirements under: (a) military and police personnel ($816,600, or 11.6 per cent), primarily owing to the higher actual average vacancy rates for military observers and military contingents, and the lower level of deployment of United Nations police officers; and (b) civilian personnel ($251,500, or 1.2 per cent), primarily under international

staff due to the departure of staff members in March 2016. The underexpenditure was partly offset by higher requirements under operational costs ($98,100, or 0.4 per cent), which reflects overexpenditures under consultants, official travel, facilities and infrastructure, information technology and other supplies, services and equipment, and underexpenditures under ground transportation, air transportation, communications and medical services (see para. 6 below).

Incorrect recording of expenditures

6. The Advisory Committee notes from the budget performance report that, under operational costs, a number of expenditures were recorded under classes other than those for which they were budgeted, leading to variances reported in the performance report (see A/71/639, paras. 41, 42, 47, 48 and 49). For example, the reported overexpenditure of $148,900 (11.3 per cent) under information technology was due to the recording of expenditures for commercial communications and spare parts budgeted under communications, while the reported underexpenditure of $25,100 (15.8 per cent) under medical was owing to the recording of related expenditures for medical evacuations under military observers. In the case of expenditures related to individual contractors, the expenditures were reported under three classes, namely consultants (overexpenditure of $134,400, or 896 per cent) and travel (overexpenditure of $118,200, or 17.6 per cent), in addition to other supplies, services and equipment (overexpenditure of $865,100, or 18.8 per cent) under which such expenditures were budgeted. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the expenditures incurred for individual contractors had been recorded inadvertently and that the Mission had since ensured proper recording of these expenditures. **The Advisory Committee is concerned that the incorrect and inconsistent recording of expenditures hinders a proper comparison and analysis of the expenditure patterns.** The Advisory Committee's observations and comments on this issue are also contained in its report on cross-cutting issues related to peacekeeping operations (A/71/836).

Matters pertaining to the report of the Board of Auditors

7. In considering the reports of the Secretary-General on the financing of MINURSO, the Advisory Committee also had before it the report of the Board of Auditors on the accounts of the United Nations peacekeeping operations for the financial period ended 30 June 2016 (A/71/5 (Vol. II), chap. II). In its report, the Board observed that the Mission was one of only two missions that met the target of the total property management performance index during the reporting cycle. The Board also made observations and recommendations pertaining to MINURSO on medical emergency preparedness, long-outstanding accounts receivables, environmental efforts (see paras. 46 and 47 below) and instances of fully depreciated assets still in use (see also A/71/845 and A/71/836). **The Advisory Committee notes the efforts made by the Mission on property management and trusts that the recommendations of the Board of Auditors will be implemented expeditiously.**

8. The comments of the Advisory Committee on the information presented in the budget performance report of the Secretary-General on individual objects of expenditure can be found, where relevant, in the discussion of the proposed budget for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018 (A/71/760 and Corr.1) in section IV below.

III. Information on performance for the current period

9. The Advisory Committee was informed that, as at 31 December 2016, a total of $1,182,955,000 had been assessed on Member States in respect of the Mission since its inception. Payments received as at the same date amounted to $1,141,364,000, leaving an outstanding balance of $41,591,000. As at 13 February 2017, the cash position of the Mission was $6,952,400, which was not sufficient to cover the three-month operating cash reserve of $15,011,700 (excluding reimbursements for troop-contributing countries).

10. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that MINURSO had historically suffered from a negative cash position owing to delays in receiving payments of assessed contributions from Member States. However, substantial payments of assessed contributions in late 2016 had improved the cash position of the Mission, enabling it to make the quarterly reimbursement payments to the troop-contributing countries for standard troop costs for the period from August 2014 to October 2016 and for contingent-owned major equipment and self-sustainment for the period from July 2014 to September 2016. In addition, the Mission was able to repay the outstanding loan from the closed peacekeeping missions that it had earlier required to meet its operating costs. Nonetheless, the cash position of the Mission amounted to $4.9 million as at 27 February 2017 and the total outstanding assessed contribution was $40.2 million as at 1 March 2017 (see also para. 9 above).

11. **The Advisory Committee continues to be concerned about the persistent insufficient cash position of the Mission. The Committee recalls that the General Assembly has consistently stressed that all Member States should fulfil their financial obligations as set out in the Charter of the United Nations on time, in full and without conditions (see General Assembly resolution 70/247). The Committee also reiterates that the Secretary-General should continue exploring available options to address the issue of late payment of assessed contributions, including engaging more actively with Member States (see A/70/742/Add.3, para. 9).**

12. In respect of claims for death and disability compensation since the inception of the Mission, an amount of $80,000 had been paid in respect of two claims as at 31 January 2017. The Advisory Committee was informed that there were no pending death or disability claims.

13. The Advisory Committee was also informed that, as at 31 January 2017, the incumbency for the Mission was as follows:

	Authorized approved[a]	*Encumbered*	*Vacancy rate (percentage)*
Military observers	218	200	8.3
Military contingent personnel	27	27	–
United Nations police	12	–	100
Posts			
International staff	89	75	15.7
National staff	168	159	5.4
United Nations Volunteers	18	9	50

[a] Represents the highest authorized strength for 2016/17 for military and police personnel and the approved posts for civilian personnel.

14. With respect to the current and projected expenditures for the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017, the Advisory Committee was informed that, as at

31 January 2017, expenditures for the period amounted to $33,878,900, or 64.5 per cent of the appropriation. At the end of the current financial period, the estimated total expenditures would amount to $52,334,400 against the appropriation of $52,550,400, leaving a projected underexpenditure of $216,000, or 0.4 per cent. Upon enquiry, the Committee was provided with information showing that the projected expenditures at the end of the current financial period remained unchanged as at 31 March 2017.

IV. Proposed budget for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018

A. Mandate and planned results

15. The mandate of MINURSO, established by the Security Council in its resolution 690 (1991), was most recently extended to 30 April 2017 by the Council in its resolution 2285 (2016). The Mission is mandated to help the Council to achieve an overall objective, namely, a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara (see A/71/760, para. 2).

16. The Secretary-General indicates that MINURSO will: (a) continue its observation and monitoring activities to ensure the compliance of the parties with the ceasefire agreement; (b) provide continued support to the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General in the performance of his functions; (c) continue its facilitation of the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in implementing and seeking to expand the confidence-building measures programme of family visit exchanges between the area west of the berm and the refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria, once the programme resumes after its suspension in June 2014; (d) provide logistical support to the African Union representatives in Laayoune; and (e) carry out mine action activities in support of the Mission's mandate to the east of the berm (ibid., para. 7).

17. With headquarters established in Laayoune, the Mission will continue to operate at nine team sites at the east and west of the berm in Western Sahara and maintain its Liaison Office in Tindouf, Algeria (ibid., paras. 5 and 23).

B. Regional mission cooperation and partnerships

18. It is indicated that the Mission will continue to work closely with the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe, Uganda, and the United Nations Global Service Centre in Brindisi, Italy, as well as neighbouring missions to explore opportunities of cooperation that may lead to increased efficiencies. The logistical support to UNHCR, on a cost-reimbursable basis, is expected to continue once the programme of confidence-building measures resumes. The Mission will continue to work closely with all stakeholders in the Mission area, namely, the African Union, United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations (ibid., paras. 23 and 24).

C. Resource requirements

19. The proposed budget for MINURSO for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018 amounts to $55,155,600, representing an increase of $2,605,200, or 5 per cent, in gross terms, compared with the appropriation of $52,550,400 for

2016/17. The proposed increases in resource requirements for 2017/18 are mainly due to higher requirements under military and police personnel ($574,800, or 8.5 per cent) and operational costs ($4,516,700, or 19 per cent), partly offset by reduced requirements under civilian personnel ($2,486,300, or 11.3 per cent). An analysis of variances for 2017/18 is provided in section III of the proposed budget of the Secretary-General.

1. Military and police personnel

Category	*Authorized 2016/17*[a]	*Proposed 2017/18*	*Variance*
Military observers	218	218	–
Military contingent personnel	27	27	–
United Nations police	12	12	–
Total	**257**	**257**	–

[a] Represents the highest authorized strength for the period.

20. The estimated requirements for military and police personnel for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018 amount to $7,327,800, representing an increase of $574,800, or 8.5 per cent, compared with the apportionment for 2016/17. The proposed increase is attributable mainly to the application of the full mission subsistence allowance rate of $105 per person per day in the 2017/18 period, compared with $54 per person per day applied in the 2016/17 period, as a result of the cessation of voluntary contributions (hotel rooms and meals) from the host country since mid-March 2016 for military observers, military staff officers and United Nations police officers.

21. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, after the cessation of the voluntary in-kind contributions from the host country, MINURSO started to cover the costs of meals and accommodations for those affected and eventually introduced two higher rates for Laayoune in July 2016, as determined by the Office of Human Resources Management, as follows: (a) $105 ($60 for housing, $31 for food and $14 for incidentals) applicable to those with hotel accommodation; and (b) $83 ($47 for housing, $24 for food and $12 for incidentals) for those with private accommodation, while the rate of $54 was maintained for those based at the team sites, taking into account the provisions provided. The Advisory Committee will revert to the matter related to mission subsistence allowance, including the methodology applied for the calculation of allowance rates, in the context of its consideration of the next report of the Secretary-General on human resources management.

22. Proposed delayed deployment factors applied to the estimates for military and police personnel for 2017/18 are 10 per cent for military observers, 1 per cent for military contingent personnel and 90 per cent for United Nations police. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the high vacancy rate for United Nations police was due to the suspension of the UNHCR-led programme of confidence-building measures (see para. 16 above), and that United Nations police officers would be called in and deployed immediately should UNHCR reach an agreement with the parties with respect to the resumption of the programme.

23. **The Advisory Committee recommends approval of the resources requested for military and police personnel for 2017/18.**

2. Civilian personnel

Category	*Approved 2016/17*	*Proposed 2017/18*	*Variance*
International staff	89	82	(7)
National staff[a]	168	160	(8)
United Nations Volunteers	18	18	–
Government-provided personnel	10	10	–
Total	**285**	**270**	**(15)[b]**

[a] Includes National Professional Officers and national General Service staff.

[b] It is proposed that the functions of 10 posts (2 Field Service and 8 national General Service staff) be transferred to the Regional Service Centre (see paras. 27-29 below).

24. The estimated requirements for civilian personnel for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018 amount to $19,579,700, a decrease of $2,486,300, or 11.3 per cent, compared with the apportionment for 2016/17. The proposed decrease in resources is mainly the result of the proposed higher vacancy rates and the overall reduction of 15 posts, including the transfer of functions to the Regional Service Centre, where 10 new posts are proposed (see paras. 27-29 below and the report of the Advisory Committee on the proposed budget for the Regional Service Centre (A/71/836/Add.9)).

25. The cost estimates for civilian staff for 2017/18 reflect vacancy factors of 8 per cent for international staff, 4 per cent for national General Service staff, 40 per cent for United Nations Volunteers and 90 per cent for government-provided personnel. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the projected vacancy rate for government-provided personnel was increased to 90 per cent for 2017/18 in view of persisting uncertainties linked with the negotiations between the African Union and the host country on the redeployment of personnel to the observer delegation office in Laayoune. As for the projected vacancy rate of 8 per cent for international staff, the Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that this was in line with the historical pattern and actual average vacancy rates for the 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16 periods (3 per cent, 6.6 per cent and 6.7 per cent respectively), while the higher vacancy rate of 15.7 per cent during the current 2016/17 period was mainly due to the Mission's inability to continue its recruitment process, stemming from the demand of the host country that international staff depart. **The Advisory Committee reiterates its view that budgeted vacancy rates should be based, as much as possible, on actual vacancy rates. In cases where the proposed budgeted rates differ from the actual rates at the time of the budget preparation, clear justification should be provided in related budget documents for the rates applied (see A/70/742, para. 45). The Committee therefore recommends that a vacancy rate of 15 per cent be applied to estimates for international staff for 2017/18 and any related operational costs be adjusted as appropriate.**

26. The proposed 2017/18 budget reflects a total abolishment of 16 posts (8 Field Service and 8 national General Service), the establishment of 1 P-5 post, the reassignment of 3 posts and the redeployment of 22 posts, reflecting the following (see A/71/760, paras. 15-17, 34, 35 and 38):

(a) The proposed abolishment of 11 posts (3 Field Service and 8 national General Service) and the transfer of functions relating to 10 posts (2 Field Service and 8 national General Service) to the Regional Service Centre (see paras. 27-29 below).

(b) The proposed abolishment of five Field Service posts, as recommended by the civilian staff review: two in the Transport Section and three in the Communications and Information Technology Section;

(c) The proposed establishment of a P-5 post for the new role of Chief of Supply Chain Management and Service Delivery in the context of the realignment of the organizational structure of the Mission Support Division in accordance with the global field support strategy. It is proposed that the structure of Mission support be realigned into two main pillars, one administered by the proposed Chief at the P-5 level and the other by the Deputy Chief of Mission Support at the P-5 level (through redeployment);

(d) The proposed reassignment of three positions: two Field Service positions to the Security Section as Security Officers from the Surface Transport Section (drivers) as a result of growing security concerns; and one United Nations Volunteer position as Environment Officer to the Risk Monitoring and Compliance Unit from the Engineering Section (see also para. 46 below);

(e) The proposed redeployment of 22 posts in the context of the realignment of the organizational structure of the Mission Support Division in accordance with the global field support strategy, as illustrated on page 22 and explained under the relevant organizational units in section I.E of the proposed budget of the Secretary-General.

Proposed transfer of functions to the Regional Service Centre

27. The proposed abolishment of 11 posts (3 Field Service and 8 national General Service) and the transfer of functions relating to 10 posts (2 Field Service and 8 national General Service) to the Regional Service Centre include the following (ibid., paras. 36, 37 and 46):

(a) The abolishment of six posts in the Finance and Budget Section, comprising two Field Service (1 Cashier Assistant and 1 Finance Assistant) and four national General Service posts (2 Finance Assistants, 1 Budget Assistant and 1 Team Assistant) and the transfer of those functions to the Regional Service Centre (including the conversion of the two Field Service posts to national General Service posts at the Centre);

(b) The abolishment of four national General Service posts in the Human Resources Section, comprising two Travel Assistants and two Human Resources Assistants, and the transfer of those functions to the Centre; and the abolishment of one Field Service post.

28. The Secretary-General indicates that the Mission's payroll processing for national staff and the military component had been transferred to the Regional Service Centre during the 2016/17 financial period (ibid., para. 23). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, of the functions of the 10 posts proposed for transfer to the Regional Service Centre, 2 Finance Assistants posts (1 Field Service and 1 national General Service) in the Finance and Budget Section were related to the payroll function. The Committee recalls that, with the implementation of Umoja Extension 1 for national staff and uniformed personnel in field missions in November 2016 (known as cluster 5), the Department of Field Support moved payroll processing for those staff to two locations on 1 November 2016: payroll processing for missions based in Africa was moved to the Regional Service Centre (except the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI)); and payroll processing for all other missions was moved to the Kuwait Joint Support Office (except for the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti and the United Nations Mission in Colombia). The Committee was informed, upon enquiry, at that

time that the centralization of payroll services at the Kuwait Joint Support Office was intended to be an interim arrangement to support the implementation of Umoja pending further consideration by the General Assembly in the context of the global service delivery model for the Secretariat (see A/71/595, para. 53). **The Advisory Committee reiterates that, while it does not object to an interim arrangement to support the implementation of Umoja, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 70/248, any changes to the existing and future service delivery model must be approved by the Assembly (see A/71/595, para. 55). In that context, the Committee does not object to the proposed transfer of the functions of the two posts for Finance Assistants (one Field Service and one national General Service at MINURSO) to the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe for 2017/18 (two national General Service posts in the proposed budget for the Centre).**

29. The Secretary-General further indicates that the implementation of Umoja has enabled the transfer of the non-location dependent support services to the Regional Service Centre to realize the benefits of economies of scale, and that the movement also allows for business continuity, a more sustainable environment for staff and opportunities to standardize service delivery, aside from mitigating the risks associated with the Mission-specific events (see A/71/760, paras. 15 and 60). However, the Advisory Committee was also informed in the context of its review of the proposed budget for 2017/18 for the Centre that the urgency of the operational situation called for the inclusion of MINURSO as a core client of the Centre for the 2017/18 period. Upon enquiry as to the nature of the Regional Service Centre, the Committee was informed that the Centre provided a full range of financial and personnel administrative transactional services to missions based in East and Central Africa.[1] The addition of MINURSO was part of the initiative by the Department of Field Support to address operational challenges faced by the Mission. **The Advisory Committee recalls that the General Assembly has requested the Secretary-General to submit for the consideration of the Assembly at the main part of its seventy-second session a report on the global service delivery model containing a comprehensive and fully developed proposal that continues to take into account the views of all stakeholders (see General Assembly resolution 71/272, sect. XVII, para. 7). The Committee therefore recommends against the proposed abolishment of the eight posts (1 Field Service and 7 national General Service) in the Finance and Budget Section and the Human Resources Section of MINURSO for 2017/18 and further recommends that the eight posts be included in the budget for the Mission, which would represent an increase of $369,100 in the proposed budget for the Mission for 2017/18, including related resources under staff and operational costs. In that connection, the Committee recommends against the proposed establishment of the eight posts (national General Service) in the budget proposal for the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe for 2017/18 (see also A/71/836/Add.9).**

30. **Subject to its comments and recommendations in paragraphs 25 and 29 above, the Advisory Committee recommends approval of the Secretary-General's proposals for civilian personnel for 2017/18.**

[1] MINUSMA was added as a client mission to the Regional Service Centre from 1 July 2016, as the finance and human resources administrative processes of MINUSMA had been supported by 42 posts located at UNOCI, which is in the process of withdrawal and closure in the first half of 2017 as mandated by the Security Council (see A/70/754, para. 10 and A/70/742/Add.17, para. 56).

Extended absence of staff on special leave with full pay

31. With respect to the return of the international staff to the Mission area following their departure in March 2016 (see para. 4 above), the Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that 17 staff members had been away from the Mission since 21 March 2016 and were currently in their respective home countries, on special leave with full pay. The total salaries and entitlements for those staff amounted to $1,099,925 for the period from March 2016 to 31 January 2017. The Committee was also informed, upon enquiry, that given the political background of the situation, a decision was made by Headquarters to examine all possible options with the Government of Morocco for the return of the affected staff members before exploring other scenarios. **The Advisory Committee considers that this issue needs to be urgently addressed to minimize the cost accruing to the Organization from payments of salaries to staff when services are not rendered (see A/AC.96/1147/Add.1, para. 24).**

32. Upon enquiry regarding efforts to engage those staff in temporary assignments in other operations, the Advisory Committee received inconsistent and unconvincing information, as follows: (a) according to the Secretariat, the Department of Field Support had proposed some of the affected staff members for temporary duty assignment to Colombia, but asserted that there was a limitation owing to the requirements for start-up experience and knowledge of the Spanish language; and (b) in the context of MINUSCA, the Committee was informed that other missions were not approached to consider those staff on special leave with full pay from MINURSO as potential candidates for temporary duty assignments. Rather, missions, including MINUSCA, were only approached to consider those staff for lateral reassignments to vacant positions under the authority of the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Field Support. In addition, the Committee was also informed that, while the Organization was continuing discussions with the Government of Morocco on the return of those staff to the Mission, the Department of Field Support and the Mission had contacted the affected staff members to discuss the way forward and alternative options. Upon further enquiry, the Committee was provided with a table showing the functional titles of the 17 staff members (see annex).

33. **While the Advisory Committee recognizes the urgent need for MINURSO to return to full functionality as emphasized by the Security Council (see para. 4 above), it notes with concern the extended absence of the 17 staff from the Mission on special leave with full pay since late March 2016 and the lack of concerted effort to temporarily assign those staff members to other operations. The Committee strongly disapproves of such practice which, in its view, should be discontinued immediately. The Committee therefore also expects that the Secretary-General will provide an update on the status of the 17 staff members on special leave with full pay to the General Assembly at the time of its consideration of the proposed budget for 2017/18.**

3. Operational costs

Apportioned 2016/17	*Proposed 2017/18*	*Variance*
$23,731,400	$28,248,100	$4,516,700

34. The estimated operational requirements for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018 amount to $28,248,100, representing an increase of $4,516,700, or 19 per cent, compared with the apportionment for 2016/17. An analysis of variances is provided in section III of the proposed budget report.

35. The proposed increases under operational costs reflect higher requirements owing mainly to (see A/71/760, paras. 66, 68 and 71):

(a) Air transportation ($2,640,000, or 24.7 per cent): the proposed deployment of an additional helicopter with specialized equipment and capabilities (see paras. 36-38 below);

(b) Facilities and infrastructure ($1,648,500, or 51.6 per cent): engineering projects to drill deep-water boreholes at six team sites (see paras. 39 and 40 below), and field defence supplies for the installation of security barriers and fences to protect fuel tanks in five team sites;

(c) Other supplies, services and equipment ($371,800, or 8.3 per cent): the increased requirements for freight costs and the provision for three international individual contractors (2 drivers and 1 fuel specialist) to carry life-sustainment supplies from the west to the east of the berm and manage the emergency fuel reserve in five locations east of the berm, as the national staff are not allowed to cross the berm.

Air operations

36. The current composition of the Mission fleet contains two rotary-wing and two fixed-wing aircraft. The proposed requirements for air operations amounts to $13,339,800 for 2017/18, representing an increase of $2,640,000, or 24.7 per cent, owing to the proposed deployment of an additional third helicopter with specialized equipment and capabilities, such as security monitoring and night vision features to carry out increased air patrols and ceasefire monitoring as a result of the increased security risks at the east of the berm (ibid., para. 68). The Secretary-General indicates that security has become a growing concern for both the Mission and the parties to the conflict and that MINURSO has adjusted patrolling routes and schedules to reflect the security situations on the ground. The Mission's current fleet of two helicopters are running on 95 per cent utilization and it is therefore proposed that additional air operations capacity be created to replace some of the ground patrols with air patrols (ibid., para. 12).

37. The Advisory Committee enquired whether there would be reductions under ground transportation and was informed that the additional helicopter was requested to address existing inadequacies in effective mandate implementation and it was by no means a replacement of present capabilities. While the number of ground patrols conducted by each team would remain the same as that of 2016/17 (27 per day), ground patrols were limited to a radius of 50 km east of the berm owing to security concerns, and the requirements for fuel for vehicles had been reduced by 12 per cent. As for the rationale for using the cost of the existing helicopter contract to estimate the budget of an additional helicopter with different capabilities, the Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the objectives for engaging a third helicopter could be achieved by procuring the same type of helicopters which the Mission currently operated and installing a gyroscope-stabilized multi-sensor system for observation and surveillance (normally in the form of an external turret that could be procured and installed on a helicopter). Furthermore, owing to the recent increase in security threats and ground movement restrictions east of the berm, the Mission was in the process of revising its concept of operations with a view to increasing the Mission's logistics support activities east of the berm, and its aerial observation. Therefore, a third helicopter with enhanced air surveillance and observation capability would improve the flexibility of the Mission at times when one of the two existing helicopters was unserviceable or under maintenance. **The Advisory Committee is of the view that the Secretary-General should review**

the Mission's overall air fleet capacity, including both the rotary- and fixed-wing aircraft, and report the findings in his proposed budget for 2018/19.

38. **The Advisory Committee recommends approval of the Secretary-General's proposed resources for air transportation for MINURSO for 2017/18.**

Facilities and infrastructure

39. The proposed resources for facilities and infrastructure amount to $4,846,300 for 2017/18, representing an increase of $1,648,500, or 51.6 per cent. The proposed increase is mainly owing to the requirements of $1,855,000 under architectural and demolition services in connection with engineering projects to drill 10 deep-water boreholes at six team sites (phase IV of the project for 2017/18) (ibid., para. 66 and p. 40). The Advisory Committee notes from the supplementary information provided to it that for phase III of the project, during 2016/17, an amount of $696,000 was budgeted for drilling one borehole at a team site (with a start date of December 2014 and the planned completion date adjusted from June 2017 to April 2017). The Committee further notes from the budget performance report for 2015/16 that the bidding exercise was not successful owing to a lack of competition (see A/71/639, p. 18). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that a contract was subsequently signed in January 2017.

40. The Advisory Committee was also informed, upon enquiry, that the Mission initiated the project in 2014 by conducting the geophysical surveys and that a groundwater exploration team from the Global Service Centre in Brindisi visited MINURSO in December 2016 for preliminary studies for four of the six team sites and that all related desk studies had been completed. It was planned that the remaining activities related to geophysical surveys would be completed in May 2017. It was indicated to the Committee that the planning for the 10 deep-water boreholes at the six team sites for the 2017/18 period was based on two main reasons: (a) the one-time mobilization cost of drilling was $600,000 and it would be economical to implement the project within one year to avoid the repetition of mobilization costs; and (b) with the completion of the geophysical surveys, the remaining activities of drilling boreholes could be carried out in less than one year based on the experience the Mission had gained during 2016/17. **Taking into account the delays in the project since 2014, the Advisory Committee recommends a 50 per cent reduction ($927,500) to the proposed requirements of $1,855,000 under architectural and demolition services.**

Official travel

41. The proposed requirements for official travel amount to $599,000, representing a decrease of $71,400, or 10.7 per cent, for 2017/18, attributable mainly to (a) the reduced requirements for regional travel planned by the Office of the Force Commander; (b) the daily subsistence allowance related to within-mission travel for military observers; and (c) fewer trips proposed for external training compared with prior years for the implementation of the International Public Sector Accounting Standards, Umoja and various certification programmes for support personnel (see A/71/760, para. 65).

42. The Advisory Committee notes from the detailed information on travel it received that the planned trips for 2017/18 include the following: (a) multiple trips to New York based on different estimates; (b) travel budgeted for non-Mission personnel, such as visits from Headquarters to the Mission; and (c) multiple participants for the same conference, such as three attendees for the annual conference on information and communications technology at Brindisi. **The Advisory Committee recalls that, since 2011, the General Assembly has**

endorsed a number of measures aimed at improving the effectiveness and efficiency of resources dedicated for air travel. The Committee therefore recommends a 10 per cent ($59,900) reduction to the proposed resources under official travel for 2017/18 for MINURSO.

Mine action services

43. The estimated resource requirements for mine detection and mine-clearing services amount to $3,265,200 for 2017/18. It is indicated that, while the Mission conducts mine action activities in support of its mandate to the east of the berm, demining activities to the west of the berm will continue to be conducted by the Royal Moroccan Army. The Mission is planning to clear 3 million m^2 of subsurface area of land from known threats of landmines/explosive remnants of war for 2017/18. Furthermore, the Mission will maintain and update the Information Management System for Mine Action within 30 days of the completion of demining tasks to ensure that the Mission has the most up-to-date information on threats of landmines/explosive remnants of war (ibid., paras. 7 and 54 and p. 12).

44. The Advisory Committee recalls that it was informed during its consideration of the budget of the Mission for 2015/16 that the Mission estimated that it would take approximately 10 years to address high and medium threat areas east of the berm, covering an area of some 91 million m^2 (excluding the 5 km buffer strip), based on the survey and clearance capacity on the ground (see A/69/839/Add.3, para. 38). The Committee notes from the performance reports that the Mission cleared areas of 4.5 million m^2 in 2013/14, 8.8 million m^2 in 2014/15 and 2.7 million m^2 in 2015/16 (see A/69/595, para. 12; A/70/570, para. 13; and A/71/639, para. 13). Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that the mine action component of the Mission departed Laayoune on 20 March 2016 and all planned mine action activities east of the berm were suspended until 15 September 2016, when the component relocated to Tindouf, Algeria. While the requirements for mine clearance were evaluated on an ongoing basis, the actual time frame of clearance completion would depend on the progress achieved, which was not always uniform owing to factors such as the type of soil and weather, seasonal floods and other natural events that might shift mines and access to the area. The Mission was of the view that the time frame of eight years from now remained achievable based on the current clearance rate, subject to review in case of significant developments. **The Advisory Committee is of the view that, moving forward, the Secretary-General should provide cumulative information on the overall progress, including annual resource allocation and planned and actual areas cleared and to be cleared, in future budget proposals for MINURSO for the 10-year time frame from 2015/16 to 2024/25.**

45. **Subject to its recommendations in paragraphs 25, 29, 40 and 42 above, the Advisory Committee recommends approval of the requested resources under operational costs for 2017/18.**

4. Other matters

Environmental initiatives

46. It is indicated in the proposed budget that the Global Service Centre in Brindisi is assisting the development of renewable energy sources, of which MINURSO is proposed to be a pilot project (see A/71/760, para. 23). It is further indicated that the Mission is in the process of preparing an environmental action plan aimed at achieving environmental objectives identified through the gap analysis in areas such as energy, wastewater treatment and waste management (ibid., p. 38). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the annual

environmental action plan of the Mission included both short- and longer-term objectives on the basis of the focus areas and key activities contained in both the environment strategy (2017-2023) and the policy developed at Headquarters by the Department of Field Support and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Furthermore, the Committee was informed that the Mission had recruited a full-time Environmental Officer who was leading the development of the environmental plans and standard operating procedures for the Mission.

47. Concerning the potential reduction in the number of generators by using green energy, the Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the Mission had already prepared an initial business case for the use of wind power at its nine team sites (the Mission locations in Laayoune and Tindouf were connected to the municipal electrical grid), according to which 66 per cent of the Mission's generator holdings could be reduced if the wind power generation project was implemented at all team sites. As part of the implementation of the Rapid Environment and Climate Assistance Facility project with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), it was planned that the Mission would receive technical assistance from a UNEP consultant who would conduct a feasibility study on renewable energy options, with a focus on wind power, during the 2016/17 period. The Committee makes further comments and observations on environmental matters in its report on cross-cutting issues related to peacekeeping operations (A/71/836). **The Advisory Committee notes the environmental initiatives planned by MINURSO and trusts that the Mission will implement General Assembly resolutions 69/307 and 70/286 to reduce its overall environmental footprint. The Committee expects that more detailed information on the implementation of the environmental initiatives will be included in the budget proposal for 2018/19.**

Vehicle ratios

48. The Advisory Committee notes from the supplementary information provided to it that, of the 11 categories of vehicle ratios for civilian and military personnel, the ratios under 9 categories are above the standard ratios (approved number of personnel adjusted for vacancy rates). However, upon enquiry, the Committee was provided with information showing that ratios under only two categories were above the standard ratios (approved number of personnel without adjustment for vacancy rates). **The Advisory Committee is of the view that the presentation of the vehicle ratios, reflecting the delayed deployment factors, should be made in a consistent manner, and requests that accurate information on the Mission's vehicle ratios be provided to the General Assembly at the time of its consideration of the budget proposal for 2017/18 for the Mission.**

49. The Advisory Committee was also informed, upon enquiry, that, in line with the objective of reducing its vehicle fleet, the Mission was following guidelines and recommendations received from the Department of Field Support as follows: (a) to conduct a review by the vehicle establishment committee focusing on actual operational demand with a view to achieving synergies that would result in a considerable reduction of the light passenger vehicles component; (b) to prepare a five-year transition plan for the right-sizing of the current light passenger vehicles component as well as a phase-out plan for the disposal of surplus light passenger vehicles no later than 15 May 2017; (c) to initiate the write-off procedure of 36 light passenger vehicles to reflect the authorized ceiling of 178 by 30 May 2017, in accordance with the Mission's approved holding for the 2016/17 period; and (d) to comply with the relevant guidelines with respect to the allocation of vehicles in field missions. **The Advisory Committee trusts that the Secretary-General will report on the progress to be made with respect to the right-sizing of the Mission vehicle fleet in the budget proposal for 2018/19 for MINURSO.**

V. Conclusion

50. The actions to be taken by the General Assembly in connection with the financing of MINURSO for the period from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016 are contained in section V of the performance report (A/71/639). **The Advisory Committee recommends that the unencumbered balance of $970,000 with respect to the period from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016, as well as other income/adjustments in the amount of $723,300, be credited to Member States.**

51. The actions to be taken by the General Assembly in connection with the financing of MINURSO for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018 are contained in section V of the proposed budget (A/71/760 and Corr.1). **Taking into account its recommendations in paragraphs 25, 29, 40 and 42 above, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly appropriate an amount of $53,470,000 for the maintenance of MINURSO for the 12-month period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018, should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of the Mission.**

Documentation

- Report of the Secretary-General on the budget performance of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara for the period from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016 (A/71/639)
- Report of the Secretary-General on the budget for the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018 (A/71/760 and Corr.1)
- Report of the Board of Auditors on United Nations peacekeeping operations for the 12-month period from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016 (A/71/5 (Vol. II), chap. II)
- Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the cross-cutting issues related to the United Nations peacekeeping operations (A/71/836)
- Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on budget performance for the period from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015 and proposed budget for the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017 of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (A/70/742/Add.3)
- General Assembly resolutions 70/283 and 69/305 on the financing of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara
- Security Council resolutions 2285 (2016) and 690 (1991)

Annex

Functional titles of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara staff on special leave with full pay during the period 2016/17

No.	*Functional title*	*Level*	*Offices*
1	Legal Officer	P-4	Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General
2	Political Affairs Officer	P-4	Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General
3	Public Information Officer	P-3	Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General
4	Human Resources Officer	P-3	Human Resources Section
5	Administrative Officer	FS-6	Office of the Chief of Mission Support
6	Information Systems Assistant	FS-5	Communications and Information Technology Section
7	Administrative Assistant	FS-5	Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General
8	Telecommunications Assistant	FS-5	Communications and Information Technology Section
9	Administrative Assistant	FS-4	Office of the Force Commander
10	Information Technology Assistant	FS-4	Communications and Information Technology Section
11	Equipment Technician	FS-4	Communications and Information Technology Section
12	Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning Technician	FS-4	Engineering Section
13	Claims Assistant	FS-4	Property Management Section
14	Radio Operator	FS-4	Communications and Information Technology Section
15	Vehicle Technician	FS-4	Surface Transport Section
16	Security Officer	FS-5	Security Section
17	Security Officer	FS-4	Security Section